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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000528

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/RA AND NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2016

TAGS: PHUM ELAB PGOV AE

SUBJECT: UAE LOCAL AUTHORITIES ADDRESSING DOMESTIC WORKER
DISPUTES AND TRAFFICKING

REF: A. 05 ABU DHABI 4979

1B. ABU DHABI 277

1C. 05 ABU DHABI 15286

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (SBU) Summary: Various government authorities continue to make progress in addressing the issues of trafficking in persons and domestic worker abuse. The Dubai Police Human Rights Department is working to improve services to trafficking victims, concentrating its efforts on sex-trafficking. However, the police do not believe most prostitutes are trafficked. The Philippines Consulate General's labor office is seeing improvement in Dubai Immigration's cooperation in resolving domestic worker complaints, but it reports that federal authorities refuse to even address the issue, instead deferring to local authorities. The Bangladeshi Consulate General continues to see child camel jockeys turned in for repatriation as the die-hard camel farm owners give up hope of ever racing children again. Contrarily, Pakistani human rights activist Ansar Burney continues to claim to have witnessed dozens of children being used during daylight hours at prominent tracks. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Post has delivered the G/TIP interim assessment (ref C) to (in Abu Dhabi): Director of International Affairs for the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's Court, Yousef Al Otaiba; Ambassador designate to the U.S., Saqr Ghobash; U/S for Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Rashid al-Noaimi; and MFA Director of International Organizations, Yacub al-Hosani, (who also sits on the national anti-trafficking committee); and (in Dubai): Khalfan Hareb, Chief of Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum's diwan, Dhahi Khalfan, and Saeed bin Beleilah, Head of Dubai Immigration. The only reaction to date has been from Yacub al-Hosani, who told PolChief that the USG was not giving the UAE enough credit for protecting trafficked women. In response to the G/TIP call for the establishment of shelters, al-Hosani stated that the UAE prefers to lodge victims of trafficking in hotels rather than establish shelters. He said that these women "should be treated with dignity" and lodging them temporarily in nice hotels is the UAE's way of showing how it cares for the women.

Trafficking of Women

13. (SBU) On January 29, PolOffs from Abu Dhabi and Dubai met with Major Aref Mohammed Baqr, Deputy Director of the Dubai Police Human Rights Department, to discuss the anti-trafficking efforts of the Dubai Police. The Human Rights Department, while primarily dealing with non-trafficking issues, also assists any trafficking victims that come to them seeking assistance. According to Major Aref, the Human Rights Department each year assists approximately 100 prostitutes who claim to be trafficking victims and are seeking assistance. The Human Rights section assists the women in obtaining the necessary travel documents to return to their countries of origin and refers their investigation to the Dubai Police CID Anti-Trafficking Section. He noted that the Anti-Trafficking Section at CID almost exclusively investigates the trafficking of women, particularly prostitutes, while investigations regarding trafficking of men and children are usually handled by Dubai Immigration.

14. (SBU) Major Aref explained that most women that come to his section claiming to be trafficking victims, either come without passports, or with passports containing long-expired visas. In these cases the HR department assists them in securing travel documents, and, contrary to past practices, will have their passports or travel documents exit-stamped as immigration violators and not as prostitutes so as not to further stigmatize the victims. Now that this is widely known, he believes that most of the women who come to his office are not actually trafficking victims, but are simply seeking a way to return home without being branded a prostitute. (Comment: Judging by Aref's remarks, he clearly did not understand that a woman who has had her travel documents taken away and is not free to leave is by definition a trafficking victim. It was also clear that his

concept of trafficking is tied to prostitution or child camel jockeys only. End Comment.)

15. (SBU) Major Aref explained that to combat future trafficking, Dubai Immigration is now limiting companies to only five visas initially, with additional visas available later after the company has established itself. Furthermore, Immigration automatically suspends all transactions for any company caught sponsoring a trafficking victim. He claims that the overwhelming number of trafficking victims continue to enter on tourist visas, usually in small numbers mixed in with a larger legitimate tourist group.

Domestic Workers

16. (SBU) Also on January 29, PolOffs met with Vicente Cabe, Labor Attache at the Philippines Consulate in Dubai. Cabe stated that the Dubai Police and Immigration have considerably improved their dealings with his office regarding runaway domestic servants. Contrary to past practices when domestic worker complaints were routinely resolved by simply deporting the worker, Cabe claims that as many as 80% of the complaints presented to Immigration in the last year were resolved in the laborer's favor. The resolutions either directly addressed the cause of the complaint, or allowed the worker to change his or her sponsor without penalty.

17. (SBU) Elena Calingasan, the Labor Attache at the Philippines Embassy in Abu Dhabi, told PolOff and EconOff that while local immigration and police officials have been responsive to domestic laborer complaints, federal officials have explicitly refused to deal with the issue. According to Calingasan, Ministry of Labor officials will not even schedule a meeting to talk about domestic laborer issues because domestic workers are not covered under the Labor Law.

(Note: Matters affecting domestic workers are currently handled by the Ministry of Interior. End note.) She further thinks that it is unlikely that domestic workers will ever be covered under a labor law as long as federal labor officials refuse to even discuss the issue. On a positive note, Calingasan claims that domestic workers are generally afforded the same opportunities as provided under the Labor Law in regards to transferring sponsorship. Specifically, domestic workers are allowed to transfer their sponsorship to another sponsor either at the completion of their contract, or with a letter of no objection, without suffering a six-month or one-year ban as had been imposed in the past

18. (SBU) Officials at the Philippines Labor Office in Abu Dhabi stated that about 10 percent of the approximately 100,000 Filipino laborers in the UAE work as domestic servants. Of this 10 percent, only about 1,000 workers file labor complaints or ask for assistance annually. The officials noted that the number of Filipina domestic workers who seek assistance through unofficial channels could easily double that figure. Most of the labor complaints filed are for nonpayment of back wages, or for allegations of physical or sexual abuse. The Philippines Labor Office handles cases of payment of back wages directly, and refers reports of abuse to the police. Calingasan stated that in abuse cases, most of the abusers have been third-country Arab nationals, particularly Egyptians and Lebanese. She added that while local immigration and police officials in the city of Abu Dhabi have been quick to react to complaints, officials in al-Ain (a conservative city in the interior of the emirate of Abu Dhabi) have been either reluctant or very slow to respond to requests from the Labor Office.

Child Camel Jockeys?

19. (SBU) Between February 2 and 5, Pakistani NGO activist Ansar Burney contacted Pol Chief to report that he had witnessed "at least three dozen" boys being used as jockeys to train racing camels. When pressed for details, Burney claimed that on February 5 he had seen children in use during daylight hours at Nad al-Sheba track in Dubai and al-Wathba track in Abu Dhabi, in addition to nighttime training at undisclosed locations. He further stated that there were German and French television crews present filming the event for a documentary, but would not provide any further detail about the filming crews. Dubai PolEconoff visited Nad al-Sheba on February 7 and witnessed the camel training at the track. The camels were all jockeyed by either robots, or were being led with weighted dummies in place of a jockey. There were no children apparent. This is consistent with other events witnessed by Embassy and UNICEF officials (ref B). Burney has also posted poor-quality videos on his website www.cameljockeys.org that show camels being trained in the dark at a track purported to be in the UAE. (Comment: We viewed the videos and had a hard time making out anything except the silhouette of camels with someone/something riding them. The video leaves the viewer to assume that the riders must be children, otherwise why would they training in the

dark? End Comment).

110. (C) On February 6, PolEconOff met with the labor attache for Bangladesh in Dubai who mentioned that just that morning three former camel jockeys had been turned in for repatriation. Reportedly, the boys came from a remote area of Ras al-Khaimah emirate, where a few diehard camel farm owners had held them with the hope that they would eventually be able to return them to racing. They supposedly have now given up hope of ever having child jockeys race again and are turning in the remaining children, fearing prosecution. The labor attache stated that if there were anymore children still being hidden, it would likely be in the Digdagga area of Ras al-Khaimah or near the camel track in Ajman emirate. On February 14, Col. Najm al-Seyyar, Director of the Bani Yas Social Support Center and MoI official overseeing child jockey repatriation, stated that no children had been reported to the Ministry of Interior, or brought to the Social Support Center within the last couple of months. He further stated that MoI investigators continue random inspections of both camel farms and race tracks, and that although they had not found any new children working in camel racing, they would immediately investigate any claims of children still working in the industry.

111. (SBU) Comment: We continue to receive reports of children being used as camel jockeys from Ansar Burney (ref A), but have not yet been provided with any evidence to substantiate the claims despite several requests to Burney over the past three months. The reports, while contrary to the experiences of officers at the Embassy and the Consulate, as well as UNICEF representatives, are troubling given the prominence of the two tracks mentioned. We will continue to follow up on every lead, and will make sure that all reports from Ansar Burney are also brought to the attention of the Ministry of Interior and Dubai Police. End Comment.
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